

# Neighborhood Grapevine

News from the City of Milwaukee's  
Department of Neighborhood Services

## *Transition creates many changes*

from Lee C. Jensen, Commissioner

The transition from parts of three departments to the new Department of Neighborhoods is now in process. For your convenience in placing requests for service, the old telephone numbers remain unchanged. However, if you experience any problems in directing calls, please let me know. The staff has taken a very positive approach to the many details involved in the transition from multi-departments to one. There are many changes being made, but with everyone's cooperation and participation these changes are being made with little, if any, interruption of service. The activities to date are as follows:

- **Thanks to the efforts of DPW**— particularly Bill Kappel, Jerry Froh, Bryan Pawlak, Gary Amundson and their staffs—the fiber optic cable connection between the vector field office on Fond du Lac Avenue and downtown has been installed and computers have been connected to the server in the Department of Neighborhoods' tenth floor office. This is one of the first steps in the project to consolidate all property information in the Neighborhood Services System (NSS).

- **The computer system formerly known as BIS** has been renamed NSS or Neighborhood Service System. You can now find nuisance complaints and city-owned vacant lot complaints on the system. We have also changed the terminology from "complaints" to service requests to more accurately reflect the fact that most of the complaints we receive are requests for service.

- **The centralized service request operation** is up and running. Individuals were given data entry and referral training for complaints and service requests coming into the new department. All of the clerks involved in the system have not yet been relocated from their various locations to the proposed new areas. But, all of the service requests are being entered on NSS.

## *DNS Receivership program goes after tax scoffers*

from Todd Weiler, Public Information

In an amazing short amount of time some collective and coordinated efforts paid off as the City was able to collect over \$23,000 in back taxes from a Fox Point businessman.

After months of ignoring summonses and past bills, the owner Mirza Fahim Beg presented the city with a cashier's check for \$23,550 to pay for the overdue tax bill and the costs related to taking over his gas station at 7110 W. Lisbon Ave. The group effort was conducted with staff from the City Attorney's Office, the City Treasurer's, the Police Department and the Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS).

Just five days before the deadline to pay 1998 taxes, a court allowed DNS to take control of the gas station and operate it until the tax bill and expenses were paid. A day later the matter was released to the media and DNS through its Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation (NIDC), a management firm was hired to operate the station after police secured the facility.

By the third day the owner was making promises to pay the bill and work on installment plans to pay down the deficits on the other Milwaukee property he owns.

The receivership effort and the news it generated in the Journal Sentinel on 1/29/99 and 1/30/99 sent a strong message that delinquent owners should pay their taxes. The effort also noted that businesses can no longer operate behind contaminated or "brown field" type property, make a profit and simply walk away from a potential problematic property.

DNS was able to implement the court order in less than 48 hours. The owner was assessed \$300 for the City Attorney's costs and DNS was reimbursed \$450 to cover the costs related to hiring TEAM management. The property is still unrecorded and Property Recording manager Jim Styers has sent out an application. ☺

**See DNS CHANGES on page 2**

## **DNS CHANGES from page 1**

- As of February 1st the **NSS system now contains information on permits** as well as orders from all sections and all service requests for the department. This effort was part of our ongoing work to eliminate Y2K problems, but, more importantly, it allows easy access to all of the department's files at one location. The file format is also easier to understand and interpret.

- The **department web page** was changed to reflect the new department operation. It is anticipated that by the end of February the web page will include property recording information and all of the orders and service request information which is now available internally. The information is at the beta test phase and work needs to be done to write the instructions for people so they can access and interpret the information. Users will be able to look at a block and tell at a glance where the complaints and violations have occurred. Contact information from those that have recorded will be available, other the data from MPROP will be listed. By having the information available to the public we anticipate that it will reduce telephone requests for information and save time. In addition, community groups and block clubs will be able to find out the status of the properties in their neighborhoods as well as the names and telephone numbers of absentee owners. Permit information will be added to the web page in the near future.

- **The former Health Department employees will be moving to the Mitchell Street office on February 18.** The block grant employees now located at the Mitchell Street office will move to the housing division office in the 809 building under the direction of Leo Ries. The vacant lot maintenance staff, formerly from DCD, have already moved from the 809 building to Mitchell Street. The court enforcement staff formerly with the Health Department also have moved to the Mitchell Street office.

- **A series of meetings have been held with various groups to discuss** the new service role of the DNS. These groups include community organizations, the neighborhood housing coalition and the Neighborhood Improvement Council (NIC) which was part of the proposal for the multi-department oversight committee for the new department. There will be more to report from these committees as they formulate their agendas for the coming year. There are also a number of internal committees that continue to meet to resolve issues such as the evaluation criteria for the new department and the consolidation of information on the NSS system.

- **The first organizational phone list has been distributed.** The organizational chart is being modified and there will be some reclassifications for personnel to implement the new structure. We are working on this issue, and you will receiving the information within the next month or so. The organizational chart is on the last page.

- The Common Council allowed the new department to **enter into a contract for an outside legal firm to handle the backlog of receivership cases.** This will allow the department, in conjunction with the City Attorney's Office, to process about 55 receivership cases. The City Attorney is still handling receiverships with special emphasis on the more difficult or unusual ones. You have heard about the recent receivership case involving a gas station which was considerably behind in the payment of taxes. ☺

## **DNS LOOKS AT STATE CONDOMINIUM LAWS**

**from Leo J. Ries, deputy commissioner**

In response to the spate of problems that have arisen in association with certain condominium developments in Milwaukee (most notably North Meadows and Main West), staff from DNS have convened a work group to look at state legislation which regulates condominium associations. This work group is composed of lawyers, state legislators, management firms and other individuals who have expertise in this area. The goal of this group is to develop a series of proposals which can be introduced into the state legislature this spring. Although this initiative will not resolve the immediate problems that are occurring at Main West and North Meadows, we believe that certain legislative changes can reduce the likelihood of these problems recurring in other developments. ☺

## **HOME IMPROVEMENT LENDING EXAMINED**

City Comptroller Wally Morics issues an annual report analyzing lending patterns of area financial institutions. In his latest report (March 1998) he noted, with alarm, a 53 percent denial rate on 1996 home improvement loans in Milwaukee's near north and south side neighborhoods. This trend is very troubling.

DNS staff, at the direction of Mayor Norquist and with the encouragement and support of Aldermen Pratt and Henningsen, convened a work group consisting of New Opportunities for Home Ownership In Milwaukee (NOHIM) lenders and other interested parties to look at this problem and to develop an appropriate response. This group has crafted a new home improvement loan program modeled on the highly successful Capital Access Program. This new program, which has been dubbed the Home Improvement Capital Access Program (HICAP), will be a partnership of local lenders, MGIC, the Class Committee from the American Family Insurance Lawsuit and the Department of Neighborhood Services. Some final issues are still being resolved; however, we hope to announce the program this spring in time for the summer home improvement season. ¶

## **DNS LOAN PROGRAMS UNDERGO SELF-ASSESSMENT**

In order to insure maximum efficiency and continual quality improvement, DNS wanted to assess the policies and procedure relative to the loan programs which it operates through its affiliate agency, the Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation (NIDC). DNS hired the Enterprise Foundation to evaluate the efficiency of our lending programs. The Enterprise Foundation is a national nonprofit organization which works with communities around the country to improve the quality and availability of affordable housing. Their report will be available by late spring or early summer. ☺

## LINDSAY HEIGHTS DEVELOPMENT MOVES FORWARD

Lindsay Heights is a collaborative effort of the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) and the Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation (NIDC), an affiliate of the Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS).

This project was started in late 1997 in an effort to revitalize an older Milwaukee neighborhood and to improve the quality of housing stock and tax base. Using manufactured housing technology, this initiative proposes to construct up to 100 new homes in the area bounded by Clarke Street, Brown Street, 20th Street and I-43 freeway. Currently there are three builders working with WHEDA and NIDC on this initiative: Northbrook Homes, Quality Modular Homes and Crosswinds Communities. On February 5th they celebrated the grand opening of their model homes at 15th and Fond du Lac. Please feel free to stop by and see what Milwaukee has to offer in terms of new, affordable, conveniently located, central city housing. For more information or to tour the model homes, contact Leo Ries at 286-5600. ☺

## FREDDIE MAC "ALLIANCE" KICK-OFF PLANNED

In October 1998 Freddie Mac announced an alliance with the City of Milwaukee and with NOHIM. This partnership could provide up to \$50 million loan products for every neighborhood and income level in the city. Some of the new loan products that will be available include a purchase-rehab product where a homebuyer can borrow money to purchase a home and make home improvements all at once! Staff from NOHIM and from DNS are currently planning a training session for lenders which will be held on February 23rd. ☺

## DNS RECEIVES STATE GRANT TO IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF HOMES

As a result of a collaborative effort of the Neighborhood Services Staff and faculty from the UWM School of Architecture and Urban Planning, DNS has been successful in securing a grant from the State of Wisconsin for \$175,000. These funds will be used to improve the energy efficiency of homes participating in the Targeted Investment Neighborhood program. ☺

## DOWN PAYMENT AND CLOSING COST GRANTS AVAILABLE

NIDC, an affiliate of DNS, recently received funds from the State of Wisconsin to provide down-payment and closing grants to homebuyers in certain targeted neighborhoods. NIDC received sufficient money to help 20 to 30 first-time homeowners. Priority consideration for this program will be those families who buy homes in one of the Targeted Investment Neighborhoods. For more information call the DNS Rehab Loan Hotline at 286-5618. If you would like additional information on any of these items please call Leo Ries at 286-5600. ☺

## DNS TAKES A FRESH LOOK AT THE NUISANCE VEHICLE PROBLEM

from Marty G. Collins, Deputy Commissioner

During the budget study that spurred the creation of DNS, one of the things commonly noted as a problem by focus group participants were nuisance vehicles. People wanted a faster resolution to the problem. Even before DNS was completely finalized, the staff started to brainstorm with all of the participants in the process. As a result, a number of potential areas for improvement were identified. At the very end of 1998 a contract was entered into with the Department of Transportation to provide faster vehicle information which is necessary to issue appropriate orders. Inspectors were asked what could be done to get faster response from property owners and vehicle owners. It was suggested that the vehicle be identified with a large sticker similar to the condemnation stickers but one that was placed on the car on the initial inspection. This process went into effect on February 3. If you see vehicles with bright lime yellow warning stickers, you will know that DNS is in the process of ordering the removal of the vehicle. ☺

The ordinance defining nuisance vehicles is also a part of the problem. It limits what can be towed to health and safety problems and does not allow towing of those which are a blight on the community and a threat to the general welfare. A work group has come up with a draft which will be refined and then introduced into Council. We will be monitoring the results of these changes to determine whether or not they are effective in speeding up the removal of nuisance vehicles. ☺

## SPEEDING UP THE ABATEMENT OF EXTERIOR SANITATION NUISANCES

It is said that only a fool tests the depth of the water with two feet. With that in mind, we have begun a test of a new procedure aimed at getting earlier response by property owners to complaints of citizens concerning exterior sanitation problems. Based on the successful telephone complaint response system from the Residential Code Enforcement Section, the test involves a process of calling property owners 48 to 72 hours prior to inspection to notify them of the problem and to ask for their participation. The City of Dayton, Ohio recently patterned a similar program on Milwaukee's system and has completed a test showing a 65 percent response rate. Winter is the hardest time of the year to be successful at this problem and we anticipate that results will improve along with the weather. Should the tests prove successful, we will expand the program; if not, we will drop it. The Apartment Association has agreed to participate in the effort to make this work. ☺

## REINSPECTION FEES AS COMPLIANCE TOOLS

The former Department of Building Inspection used reinspection fees to both recoup its code enforcement costs and to give an additional incentive to property owners to comply with the code. Due to a recent code change, the inspectors from Vector and Nuisance Control and Environmental Health will also be able to utilize this technique. While Vector/Nuisance Control inspectors already recouped some of their costs through administrative charges, there are other areas in this division where this technique can be used. A similar incentive system involving quadruple fees when permits are not taken out will also be pursued. ☺

## CHARGE IT!

A four-year effort begun by the former Department of Building Inspection has now resulted in Council approval of a number of departments' ability to use credit cards for the payment of permits and fees. While this will primarily benefit the Permit Center in the Department of City Development, the new Department of Neighborhood Services will also be able to use credit cards for such things as Certificates of Code Compliance. ☺

## DNS How to reach us



3646 - 1673 S. 9th St, 3rd Flr  
5600 - 809 N. Broadway, 2nd Flr  
3441 - 841 N. Broadway 10th flr

3441	Admin Office	3386	FAX Mitchell
2514	Boilers	5447	FAX NIDC
2163	CDA	5164	FAX Nuisance
3838	Code Compliance	8715	Graffiti Hotline
3874	Code Enf. Commercial	5600	Housing & NIDC
2268	Code Enf. Residential	2954	Landlord Training
2557	Condemnation	3443	Microfilm
2513	Construction	3646	Mitchell Recept.
2532	Electrical	3535	Nuisance Control
3361	Elevator	2507	Permit Desk
3860	Enforcement	3361	Plumbing
3538	Environmental Health	5049	Property Mgmt Training
5165	FAX 16+Fon du lac	8569	Property Recording Prog.
8667	FAX Broadway	3214	Public Information

**All City Prefixes are 286-**

## Department of Neighborhood Services – Chart v3.4

